

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PERNICIOUS EFFECTS

OF

Neglecting *and* Profaning

THE

HOLY SABBATH,

IN

A LETTER to his PARISHIONERS,

By the Rev. JOHN LOWE, M. A.

VICAR of HUDDERSFIELD.

SECOND EDITION.

HUDDERSFIELD.

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. BROOK, M.DCC.LXXXVII.

(Price Two-pence.)



THE following Address was originally printed for private Circulation amongst the Author's Parishioners, without the least Intention of making it further public.—A large Impression having been dispersed, and a considerable Demand having since been made for it, the Author is induced with the Advice of his Friends to reprint it, and send it out into the World.—The Observations it contains may be trite and familiar—but they are not on that Account less likely to be useful: and, as a Desire to promote the Welfare of his People, was the Author's Motive for writing it, He hopes, the Motive, will soften the Rigour of Criticism; on the Performance.

Huddersfield,

May 15, 1787.

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

My dear Friends,

A SINCERE Desire to promote the Welfare of the Community, and of the Town and Neighbourhood of *Huddersfield* in particular, (to which I am attached by the strongest Ties of Gratitude and Affection;) could alone have induced me to address You, in this public Manner. Hitherto unknown in the literary World, I feel not the least Desire to emerge from my present Obscurity. Usefulness, not Fame, is my Object; and, should the following Address in any Measure produce the Effect I intend by it; I shall not repine at the severity of Criticism, or *feel* the Sneers of Infidelity, or Profaneness.—I pretend not to be wholly indifferent to Censure and Applause; but, whilst the latter is allowed to the Design, I shall not be disappointed, if denied to the Execution.

I ADOPT this Mode of addressing You from a Hope, that what You read, may be more attended to, than what You hear. Public Discourses are too frequently listened to with the most careless Indifference, and of course produce little or no lasting Effect: whilst an Address of this familiar Nature, has at least the Probability of being *read*, with some Degree of Attention. Attention may lead to Re-

fection; and Reflection must be favourable to Truth.—It seldom happens that Men are Infidels from the Result of Consideration, so much as from the Want of it: that they are led into Error, so much by their Judgment, as by neglecting to consult it. Tho' Passion may mislead,—usurp the Seat of Reason,—preclude the Exercise, or warp the Decisions of it; yet right Reason is ever abhorrent from Vice. To excite the Attention, therefore, and to call forth the Powers of Reason, seem to promise Advantage to the Cause of Religion, and Virtue.—With this Probability in View, I commit the success of my Undertaking to that Almighty Being who alone can ensure it.

NATURAL Propensities, strengthened by long Habits of Indulgence, acquire an almost irresistible Influence o'er the Mind. It is difficult for those, who have been long accustomed to do Evil, to learn to do well: and, one of the Fruits of a confirmed Habit is, an utter Aversion to every Thing that militates against it. Men are unwilling to be taught a Lesson that condemns them:—to admit a Doctrine which will disturb their Peace, or compel them to part with an evil Habit, made dear by long Indulgence. The Title of a Book, or the Name of the Author, not unfrequently determine its Reception, with Numbers of Men: Prejudice as well as Habit, disposing them at once to reject, or condemn, according to the avowed Object of the one, or their Opinion of the other. This is no where more verified, than in Publications on religious Subjects: the Adherents of one Sect disdaining, nay even holding it criminal, to peruse the Works of such Authors, as are attached to another Sect. But how is Truth likely to be affected by such Proceeding? Can any Man form a rational Judgment between *two* Opinions, who has only considered the Arguments in Favor of *one*? A partial View of a Subject must lead to a partial Conclusion: Prejudice must thereby acquire additional Strength, and gradually gain such Ascendency over the Mind, as will effectually prevent the nearer Approach of Truth.

WHATEVER

WHATEVER Obstacles may be thrown in the Way of this Address, from an Attachment to Habits, which it will not approve; I would willingly remove any Opposition that may arise from Prejudice.—With this View, let me assure You, I am not writing to support an Opinion, or to promote the Interest of a Party: for, I place no Stress upon Opinions, further then as they are subservient to the Interests of true Piety and Virtue; and every sincere Follower of Christ, of whatsoever Denomination he may be, is to me a Christian and a Brother. The Subject of this Address is a most important Part of religious Practice; and, however You may differ in Sentiment, as to Matters of Theory, there can but be one Opinion, with regard to the Necessity of Practice. Let me then bespeak your Candour, and request your impartial Perusal of the following Lines: they may eventually serve, but I hope, they cannot injure You.

THE Object that I have in View, in this Address, and which it is my Heart's Desire, and Prayer to God to promote, is, the decent and devout Observation of the Christian Sabbath. I know no Source more productive of Evils, to Individuals and the Community,—both in its immediate Effects and more remote Consequences, than the Breach and Profanation of this Day. To convince You, that it is so, I will offer the following Observations.

“THE Neglect and Profanation of the Sabbath has a natural Tendency, to weaken the Impressions and remove the Restraints of religious Fear; and consequently to introduce a numerous Train of Evils into Society.”

It cannot be expected that Men, who are Strangers, to the Worship of God, and to his sacred Word, can have any just Ideas of him; but, just Ideas of God, must be necessary to Religion and Virtue. It is rather to be feared, that such Men will have no Ideas of God at all: that He will not be in all, or in any of their Thoughts; and Men
who

who never think of God, will of course live, as without God, in the World: Now, a Course of living contrary to that which Religion recommends, must gradually subdue religious Impressions, where any have existed; and, an habitual Forgetfulness of God, from whom proceed all the Obligations and Sanctions of Religion, must remove the Restraints of religious Fear.

A THOUGHT of God will obtrude itself sometimes on the most hardened Heart, which cannot be unaccompanied with Fear; but, as the Thought, so is the Fear of God, but momentary. There must be a settled habitual Reverence of God, to produce an uniform Observance of his Will, whilst a total Forgetfulness of the *one*, must cause a total Neglect of the *other*. Thus, religious Fear, the Bond of Peace,—the Cement of Society,—the strongest Security of public and private Rights, is wholly done away;—and, in it's Place, lawless, abandoned Licentiousness rules absolute, impelling it's devoted Subjects through progressive Guilt, till the Measure of their Enormities be filled, and Justice put a Period at once to their Crimes and Lives.—Do not then, the Neglect and Profanation of the Sabbath open a Door to innumerable Evils and Mischiefs?—May we not to this Source, trace most of the Crimes and Offences, which crowd our Jails, and multiply capital Punishments to a Degree before unknown?—Many Instances have occurred, where Convicts have declared, that the Breach of the Sabbath was the leading Cause of all their Misfortunes. The Words of dying Men are generally entitled to some Degree of Credit; that they are so in this Case, will more fully appear from a short View of those Steps, which not uncommonly lead to finished Villainy.

It is usual for Persons, who employ not the Sabbath in Acts of Devotion, to abuse it to the Pursuit of Pleasure. This Phantom is pursued in various Modes, as different Inclinations prompt:—as Fashion in the different Degrees of Life may lead; or, as Opportunity and Ability may permit

permit. The lower Orders of Men, generally speaking, and especially those who are confined by Labour or Business on other Days, have no higher Gratification than that of resorting to a neighbouring Feast, or Alehouse; where the Sabbath is profaned by Quarrels, Blasphemies and Excess; and the Pain and Trouble of thinking is removed, by taking away the Power.

Now, my Friends, what are the Consequences of the Sabbath being so spent? Besides an increasing Indifference to religious Obligations, what was at first only occasional, soon becomes constant: what would not formerly have passed without some uneasy Thoughts of it's Impropriety, now wholly escapes the Notice of Conscience. Love of Excess acquires Strength by Indulgence. The Money, which is wanted for the Support of a Family at Home, or, for the unhappy Man's own Support during the Remainder of the Week, is squandered in Riot.—Difficulty and Distress are brought on:—perhaps the Loss of Employment,—Dismission from Service, increase those Difficulties.—He flies for Refuge from Distress, to the very Cause which produced it. And now, his Desires increasing with his Want of Means to gratify them, He is enticed to Acts of Meanness, Fraud, and Imposition. Excluded from lawful Employments, and deprived of the Opportunity of supporting himself, by his own honest Industry, he betakes himself to secret, and illegal Callings.—He escapes the Hand of Justice through the mistaken Lenity of Persons he has injured, or through the Art and Caution with which his Fears supply him. Success emboldens him,—past Impunity betrays him into Security. He becomes an open Depredator on the Public, and finishes a long Course of Impiety, which originated in his Neglect of religious Worship, by yielding up his Life—a Forfeit to the injured Laws of his Country, or (more horrible!) by a desperate Act of Self-Murder.

By such Steps as these do Men frequently arrive at the Summit of Wickedness, producing to Society innumerable
 Mischiefs

Mischief, and bringing on themselves consummate Wretchedness and Misery. Is it not then of the utmost Importance to guard against the first Approach to Evils such as these? No Man becomes at once so Hardened a Sinner, or sees the future Dangers of his first Deviations from Rectitude.—He proposes to himself to go thus far and no further.—He will not go to Church to Day, for he has other Engagements; but then, he does not intend to repeat this Omission. But, this first Neglect prepares him for a second, with less Scruple.—He is thus led forward by almost imperceptible Degrees wholly to decline the Worship of God.—The Knowledge and Fear of God are then soon forgotten,—and freed from those troublesome Restraints, he has Nothing to dread but human Laws. He thinks they may be eluded.—He may escape Detection—or at least evade their utmost Rigour.—He therefore gives the Rein to his Desires, and, by a Life of complicated Guilt, fully demonstrates; how ineffectual are human Laws to stop the Current of Vice, when once the Restraint of religious Fear is removed.

THUS, it is manifest, that the Neglect and Profanation of the Sabbath, has a Tendency to lessen the Sanctions of religious and moral Obligation;—and consequently to introduce a numerous Train of Evils and Mischiefs into Society. Is not this Consideration enough to guard every reasonable Man, against a Practice so big with Danger to himself, and the Community?—Every Man is interested in this Reflection—for, with the Security and Welfare of the Community, his own, are most intimately connected.

I HAVE hitherto confined myself to such Observations as are of a temporal Nature;—let us now reason together in a more serious Manner, and view this Subject in a more solemn Light.—The pernicious Effects of neglecting, and forgetting God, stop not here: they will be more severely felt hereafter. You may here perhaps scatter the Seeds of Iniquity in Triumph:—your Situation and Circumstances may preserve You above Temptation to commit those Crimes, to which
poorer

poorer Wretches are exposed:—You may maintain an Appearance of Integrity, and pass through Life with Respect: but yet—a Day of Harvest will come, when You must reap accordingly as You have sown. Let us examine therefore how far the Neglect and Profanation of the Sabbath may be likely to affect You, in the great Day of Account, when We must enter on an eternal Sabbath in Heaven, or, be doom'd to everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord.

CAN You, my Friends, give a greater Proof of your Disregard to God, than by neglecting to worship him—or by devoting that Day, which he has set apart for sacred Uses, to any worldly Employment—whether of Business or Pleasure? Is one Day in seven too much to be appropriated to the Service of him, from whom we received our Being, our Faculties, and every Thing we enjoy?—to whose good Pleasure we owe it, that we at this Moment exist,—to whose Goodness and Mercy We are every Hour indebted,—and whose every Dispensation is intended to reclaim, to save, and bless us?—What can You expect, if You deny him so reasonable a Service, but that He will withdraw his Protection from You? Do you believe in his revealed Word?—Read there (Rom. 1.) the dreadful Consequences of God's leaving Men to themselves:—giving them up to a Mind void of Judgment.—Alas! what greater Misery could befall You. By God forsaken, You are exposed to all the Guilt, your Nature is capable of arriving at,—and to all the Misery you are capable of enduring.—To your Sins there will be a Period—the wicked must cease from troubling in the Grave: but the Punishment of Sin will endure for ever,—the Worm will never die, the Fire will never be quenched.

YOUR Employment of the Sabbath, my Friends, may not be so gross and sensual as that of the lower Sort of People, nor so injurious in it's Consequences to the Community, except in the destructive Influence of bad Example. You may have Gratifications of a more refined Nature, and may pass the

Day agreeably in some little Excursion, or in some private Party of your Friends; but, remember, that every Employment of the Sabbath, which has not God for it's Object, and his Service for the Subject of it, however innocent you may imagine it, is a Perversion of that divine Institution:—amounts to a Contempt of God:—a Preference of some selfish Gratifications to the Worship of God; an Indulgence of your Bodies, hazarding the Perdition of your Souls.

SIMILAR Causes will always produce similar Effects. The Neglect and Profanation of the Sabbath, will prove a Source of Misery to You, who are in affluent, as well as those who are in needy, Circumstances.—It is a first Step to your casting off your Subjection to God: it exposes You to the Influence of those popular Opinions which are now daily getting Ground amongst us: your Minds insensibly lose the lively Ideas of God; your Hearts become less susceptible of religious Impressions: You begin to be unsettled in your Principles, and to doubt the Reality of those Truths, which are become troublesome to You: You meet with Men who have travelled the same Road before You, and reached the last Stage of Infidelity: they ridicule your Scruples, and laugh at your remaining Fears:—they succeed in their first Attempts to degrade the Author, and Founder of your Religion, and thereby to lessen the Authority of it's Sanctions: You are prevailed on to deny the Lord that bought You, and then there is but one Step more—to deny the God who made You. Infidels in Practice, are easily converted into Infidels in Theory:—'tis for their present Ease to be so,—a Circumstance that will outweigh a thousand Arguments. There is not indeed much Difference:—only while there is any Spark of Religion remaining, one may hope that Mercy will at some Time blow it into a Flame; but avowed Infidelity precludes even Hope—Charity itself is silenced, nor dares to breathe out a Prayer, for Men who deny the God to whom Prayer is addressd.—My Friends, Ye know not what Ye do. When you forsake God, your Situation is more dangerous as to it's future Effect, than his, whose Impiety exposes him to present

Ills

ills. He is sometimes awakened by the hand of Justice, to a Sense of past Errors. He finds that even here Punishment has overtaken him—and his Fears look forward to that dread Tribunal before which he, and all Men must one Day stand. Horror seizes him—and in the Anguish of his Soul he exclaims, "O wretched Man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the Body of this Sin?"—His very Soul is melted into Tears of contrite Sorrow: and a broken Heart and contrite Spirit, God will not despise:—to the labouring and heavy laden, He will give Rest, to the repenting and believing Sinner, Pardon.

BUT, You are blinded by Prosperity—Your Vices are of a more refined Nature, such as human Laws do not extend to.—Pride, Luxury, Avarice, Meanness, and a long Train of guilty Passions, find easy Admission to the Heart forsaken by God. You possess the Means of Gratification—and drink in largely of the sweet Poison of Sin. Thought, Reflection, Fear, are lost in a constant Succession and Variety of guilty Pleasures; and, humanly speaking, there is not a Probability of your being roused to a Sense of Danger, till you find yourselves in the midst of Torment.

SUCH, my Friends, are the dreadful Effects of neglecting God.—Should You not guard therefore against the first Inlet to Sin, by observing his Sabbaths, attending his worship, by reading and hearing his holy Word? Your Mind continually refreshed by just Representation of God, contemplating him as a Being of infinite Perfection and Purity—of Justice and Vengeance against Sin—of Love and Mercy to converted Sinners:—Your Heart enlivened and elevated in frequent Devotion, will be strengthened against all your Enemies, nor will Temptation be able to prevail over You, for God will be your Strength and your Shield. If you trust in Him, You will never be confounded.—He is the Rock of Ages—on which if You build, You will stand firm through Time, and Eternity,—the Gates of Hell shall never prevail against You.

SOME of You perhaps have long indulged yourselves in the occasional Breach of the Sabbath, and are not yet sensible of the bad Effects I have mentioned. If so, bless God for his forbearing Mercy—but let not Mercy embolden You to sin, or more daringly provoke him. Do not imagine that because Sentence is not executed against your evil Works speedily, that therefore it will never be executed.—Punishment does not always overtake Offenders in the same Stage, or in the same Way; and You may escape much temporal Misery, which even less Degrees of Guilt have brought on others. But know You not that Sin is a Flatterer the most dangerous, and that one of it's distinguishing Properties is, to lull the Soul into a fatal insensibility of Danger.—You may have therefore injured yourselves more than You are aware. However, if the Breach of the Sabbath be, in any Instance, productive of Evil and Danger, it may be in your Case.—Rise not therefore your Felicity on a mere Possibility, for Probability is against You. Wisdom bought by Experience is sometimes too late; but let Wisdom guide your Steps, and walk after her Instructions, and You will surely find that all her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.

MY Arguments have been chiefly addressed to your Fears, rather than to your Hopes, for, Fear is a Passion more easily wrought on, especially, when it is applied to present Evil, and Hope is directed towards Good *chiefly* future. Present Ease and Enjoyment are preferred, whatever be the future Consequence. We shun those light Afflictions which are but for a Moment, though We thereby deprive ourselves of that eternal Weight of Glory, treasured up for the Redeemed.

BUT know, that true Religion has even here it's unspeakable Comforts, the Testimony of a good Conscience, and that Peace of Mind, which passeth all Understanding:—Comforts which the World can neither give, nor take away; and which as far surpass all the imaginary Enjoyments of sinful Pleasures, as the Heavens are higher than the Earth.—

And

And yet, they are but slight Foretastes of that perfect Bliss and Glory, which God hath prepared for those who love him, and keep his Commandments.

MAY we not now infer, that the devout Observation of the Sabbath, or, profane Breach of it—as having a Tendency to promote true Religion and Virtue, or, to produce Infidelity and Vice; is the Instrument of securing our present and future Felicity, or of plunging us into temporal and eternal Misery?—I think we may.—That I may not therefore detain You longer on this Subject, I will content myself with referring You to a few Passages of Scripture, by Way of confirming the general Scope of this Address—viz. —to convince You of the Evil and Danger of profaning the Sabbath of the Lord; these Passages are to be found in Exod. xx.—xxxii. 14, &c.—Nehem. xiii. 15, 16, &c.—Isai. lvi. 2.—lviii. 13.—Ezek. xx. 13.—xvi. 24.

IF my Ideas upon this Subject are just, can You, my dear Friends, guard too much against the Breach or Profanation of the Sabbath, even in the slightest Circumstances?—Necessity is sometimes pleaded for the Exercise of particular Trades on this Day.—What—can it ever be necessary for You to sin? has our wise and gracious God made the Difficulties of this Life so great, that You can have no Leisure to prepare for the next? or, are the Interests of Time to be preferred to those of Eternity? There is a Time for all Things—and “six Days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do,” but, “in the Sabbath of the Lord, thy God, thou shalt do no Manner of Work—neither thy Children—thy Servants—nor the Stranger that is within thy Gates.”—Were You known to have determined, not to exercise your respective Callings, or to sell any Article on the Sabbath Day; Men would take Care to make every needful Provision on the preceeding Day.—A little Resolution and Perseverance would soon effect a desirable Change, in this Respect, and one Habit would give Place to another.

THESE Matters may appear, to many, trivial and unimportant; but if so in themselves, they are not so in their Effects. Every Evil is progressive and arises from small Beginnings. --Trifles lead to Things more serious; and the Breach of the Sabbath in any one Respect, prepares the Mind and affords a Pretence for profaning it in more pernicious Ways. Can a Man follow his ordinary Business on the Sunday, without depriving himself, or some of his Family, of the Opportunity of attending the public Worship of God? Must it not also unhinge his Mind, and wholly unfit it for devotional Exercise? Indeed, my Friends, you are not aware of half the Mischiefs that result from this pernicious Practice. --To have one Day of *Rest* in the Week from temporal Concerns, one would suppose, must be desirable to every Man;—both as a Refreshment from the Fatigues and Anxieties of Business, and, as Opportunity of attending to Matters of far greater Moment. For these wise and benevolent Purposes was the Sabbath instituted:—Man's real *Good* was the Object of it; for, "the Sabbath was made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath."—I beseech You, therefore, Brethren, by the Mercies of God, not to throw away the proffered Blessings from yourselves, or your Families;—let not the Things, which should have been for your Good, become to You an Occasion of falling:—do not persevere in a Practice, so destructive in it's Effects, to yourselves, your Families, and the Community:—which admits of no Defence—*scarcely*, of any Palliation.

LET me now address myself to You, who not only neglect the Worship of God and the Ordinances of Religion, but devote the Sabbath to Pleasure, Company, and sensual Gratification.—Perhaps your Minds are not yet Proof against Entreaty, nor your Hearts hardened to the Call of Reason and Religion. Hear then, I entreat You, the Voice of Love, which desires to warn You of your Danger. I have no Interest in this Address but what I feel for your Welfare. To promote your nearest and best Interests is my Heart's first Wish,—Receive this Address then, as it is meant:—

nor

nor let it be written to You in Vain.—No more profane the Sabbath of the Lord, by any unhallowed Courses: avoid, on this Day, as you would do a Pestilence, all public Places of Amusement:—abstain from all Excess as from the most deadly Poison:—come to the Sanctuary of the Lord, and there learn the End of these Things: employ the Sabbath in Works of Devotion:—use diligently the Means of Grace; walk in the Path, where Mercy meets the elect of God: look up to him, in this and all your Undertakings—be fervent in Prayer to God, and You shall soon have Cause to bless and praise him.

LASTLY, My Friends, let me write a few Words to You, whose Situation in Life secures You a Degree of Influence, that gives peculiar Weight to your Example. The Manners of the common People generally receive their Bent and Character from those of their Superiors. Let me therefore, besides the Consideration of a personal Nature, already urged, appeal to You as Friends, to the Welfare of the Community, and to the best Interests of Mankind. For your own Sakes—for the Sake of your Families, your Dependants, and the Public at large,—set a laudable Example of Regularity and Decency in the Observation of the Sabbath. Never was there a Time, which called more loudly for Reformation, than the present. Crimes and Offences are multiplied to a most alarming Degree;—and it is your Duty, as good Citizens, to step forward, and endeavour to check the Progress of Vice and Immorality;—and, as a most important Step towards this desirable Event, to promote the decent and devout Observation of the Sabbath. But, as Christians, Oh what a much stronger Plea demands your Exertions: LOVE;—the Characteristic of your Religion, requires you not only to promote the temporal, but also the eternal Interests of your Fellow-Creatures.---Come forward then in the Cause of God and Man:---let good Advice, mild Persuasion, warm Entreaty prepare the Way; and let your own Examples shine out, as Lights to all around You. You will plead most powerfully by your own Conduct: Example will give Life and Spirit to your Instructions: your Families---your Dependants, and the Neighbour-

ing

ing Poor will be influenced to imitate, and will have future Cause to bless You.

MAY that Almighty Being, who alone can order the unruly Wills and Affections of sinful Men, bless *these* my sincere Endeavours to serve You; and dispose your Hearts and Minds towards the Attainment of everlasting Life:---may you all meet together in Heaven, and there enjoy an eternal Sabbath, in the uninterrupted Service of God and of the Lamb, most sincerely prays,

Your unworthy Servant in Christ,

JOHN LOWE.

HUDDERSFIELD,

June 21st, 1786.

MA64

P. S. If Shopkeepers, and other Persons in their respective Trades, would meet together, and come to a Resolution not to work, or sell any Articles on the Sabbath Day, they would soon be relieved from all Applications of that Nature:---and as this Conduct would be general, no Offence could be taken at Individuals. You would experience much Comfort from adopting this Plan;---And You would do to other Men an essential Service.---Let me hope, therefore, that some few Well-wishers to Mankind, will exert themselves to promote a general Agreement, amongst Persons in Trade, not to work, or sell any Articles on the Sabbath Day.---A similar Agreement entered into by the Keepers of Public-Houses---not to sell any Liquor, further than needful Refreshment may require, would greatly contribute to the decent Observation of the Sabbath.

